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Inclusive Internet Governance Ecosystems

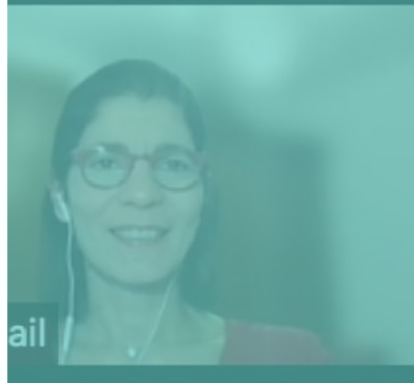
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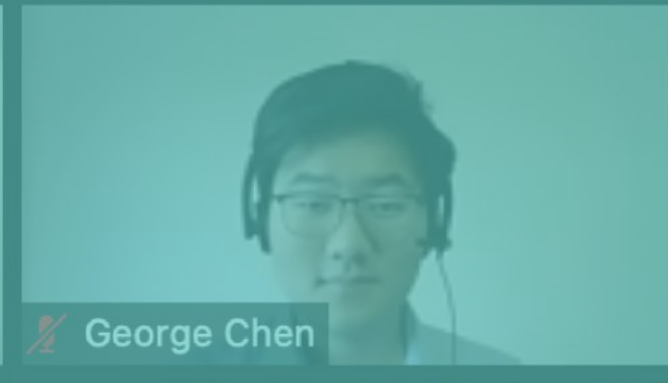
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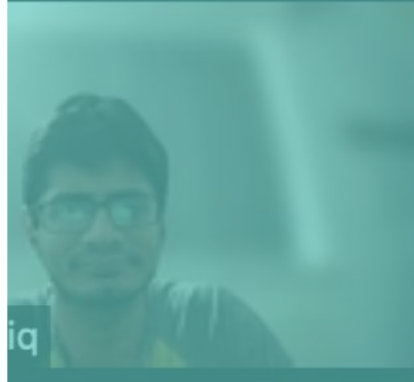
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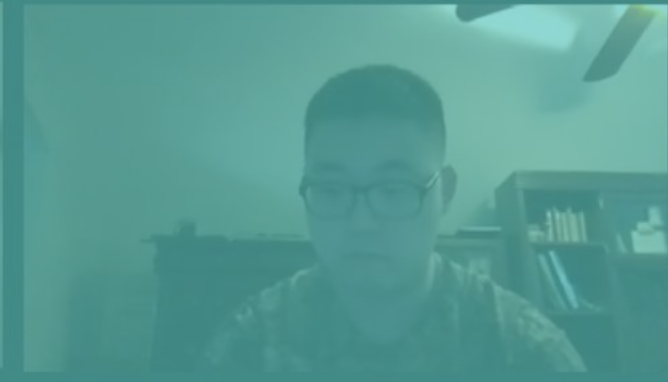
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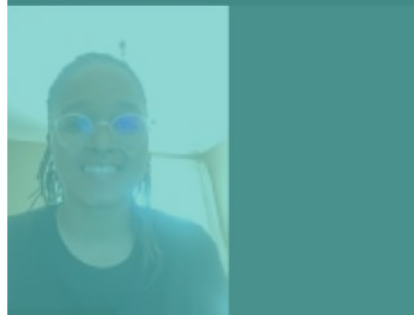
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YOUTH
INTERNET
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Gefördert durch:



Bundesministerium
für Wirtschaft
und Energie

aufgrund eines Beschlusses
des Deutschen Bundestages

Inclusive Internet Governance Ecosystems

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Introduction

An inclusive Internet governance is not a synonym for access to the Internet. This should be clear beforehand. Building a more inclusive Internet governance even embodies the right to disconnect.¹ As power dynamics are unveiled, it becomes clear that governments and big tech companies have a huge influence on many aspects of Internet governance, from Internet infrastructure to the implementation of public policies.² While countries like Denmark, Austria and France are starting to use tech ambassadors to approach Silicon Valley as if it were a global superpower, it should be clear that, depending on the processes adopted and who is effectively included in discussions and decision making, the future of the Internet could mean more concentration.^{3,4} However, what if we all governed the Internet?⁵ This question was previously asked by UNESCO in an attempt to investigate and map global experiences related to multistakeholder Internet governance in countries like Kenya, South Korea and Brazil in 2017. This seems to be one of the most important questions. Should citizens have the power to shape the Internet? Committing to this possible future of Internet governance means creating effective engagement opportunities for people who traditionally are not part of the decision-making process, groups which include youth, as well as gender, race and sexual orientation intersections. In order to address inclusive Internet governance, on 14th October, 2021, we, the YouthxPolicyMakers ambassadors, attended an online roundtable with Livia Walpen, Policy Advisor at the Swiss Federal Office of Communications, and Canadian Senator Kim Pate. With this policy paper, we strive to bring some light to this debate.

footnotes

1 The Canadian Press, 'Ontario set to introduce omnibus labour legislation, including right to disconnect', Financial Post, <<https://financialpost.com/fp-work/ontario-set-to-introduce-omnibus-labour-legislation-including-right-to-disconnect>> (Toronto, 25 October 2021)

2 David McCabe, 'Google said it had successfully 'slowed down' European privacy rules, according to lawsuit.', New York Times, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/22/technology/google-privacy-lawsuit.html>> (22 Oct 2021)

3 Adam Satariano, 'The World's First Ambassador to the Tech Industry', New York Times, (<<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/03/technology/denmark-tech-ambassador.html>> (3 Sept 2019)

4 Alexis Wichowski, 'Nations Need Ambassadors to Big Tech', Wired, <<https://www.wired.com/story/nations-need-ambassadors-to-big-tech/>> (19 Apr 2021)

5 Anri van der Spuy, What if we all governed the Internet?, (UNESCO Publishing, 2017)



Current status of policy debates and processes

A more inclusive Internet governance has been addressed by the IGF community, specially focusing on the effectiveness of the multistakeholder approach, capacity-building strategies and existing inequalities between countries. Speaking on the global governance of the Internet, it is beneficial to peek at the short history of the subject in order to meaningfully evaluate today’s circumstances. Rooted in Krasner’s consensus definition in international regime theory, multistakeholderism approaches in decision-making procedures (especially from a policy-making perspective) has been evolving ever since international telecommunications started to become the underlying bricks of today’s Internet. Although the efforts of multistakeholderism in global Internet regime formation is crowned in the World Summit on the Information Society, there is still room to discuss efficiency and the real representation rates of this approach.⁸ The Internet ecosystem is already complex but generally it relies on the tenets of (1) technical

footnotes

6 Inclusive Internet governance ecosystems and digital cooperation, <<https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/inclusive-internet-governance-ecosystems-and-digital-cooperation>> Accessed 4 Nov 2021

7 Krasner, Stephen D. (ed.) (1983) International Regimes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

8 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Geneva 2003- Tunis 2005 (<https://www.itu.int/net/wsif/>)

standardization, (2) resource allocation and (3) policy-making. While the first two can be deemed more exclusive due to the need of deeper expert knowledge on the subject matter, the last allows more space for both representation and engagement of all of the stakeholders. It is also true that any policy-making commitment can create a broad impact on other tenets of the Internet ecosystem. To give a rough description of the atmosphere, the fora of multistakeholder Internet governance is mostly achieved through annual meetings. Though producing fast actionables might be a bit unrealistic for these kinds of summits, it is of dire importance to include all stakeholders out there who use and interact with the Internet. In the emergent days of global Internet governance, the ecosystem lacked individual and civil society representation. Today one can admit that the gates are more open to be represented in the IG processes. Accordingly, civil society and individual end-users are more apparent and proactive in recent years. However, we are still struggling with a huge digital divide which results in billions of people being excluded from IG processes. We still have millions who are not aware what the Internet can mean beyond the sole use of social media. While these sentences imply the profile for accessibility and digital literacy, these two are intertwined with the notion of inclusion. People cannot be included if they are not are connected and digitally self-aware. To this end, it is clear that we have much to do to reach the focal point of information society in which each and every stakeholder is well-represented and included.

Lessons and positions resulting from the workshop stage

As we have demonstrated in this paper, multistakeholder Internet governance remains a highly contested territory in spite of the multifold discussion venues and agreements issued on the theme. Questions such as legitimacy of participation, adequate multistakeholder processes and procedures, balance of power between actors, responsiveness and accountability are far from settled. Besides that, Internet governance challenges are multifold, and each one of them requires specific considerations about the questions mentioned above. All of those

considerations, however, point to one fundamental aspect of multistakeholder governance: how can we achieve meaningful stakeholder participation? What does multistakeholder governance, in which all sectors have the capacity to effectively influence decisions, look like? During the workshops, we expressed our concerns about the prospects of meaningful participation being threatened by the pressure of two powerful actors: government and powerful private players. We highlight the danger of those players manipulating legitimate civic demands in order to further their interests: on one hand, authoritarian governments using demands for safety to curb freedom of expression and, on the other, platforms dodging their responsibility for harm under the guise of this very freedom. The Ambassadors' policy priorities focused heavily on bridging the inclusivity gap, especially when it comes to social, racial, gender, sexual orientation, age, educational and other inequalities; that is, inclusive governance is human-rights based. With the constant evolution of the Internet, youth participation in IG can be a catalyst for real change; yet there remains a clear lack of youth intervention and representation in this area, especially in the Global South. Furthermore, we agreed that a human-rights oriented approach is based on empowerment and capacity building. As a result of the agreement on those fundamental values, we settled on a proposal for the creation of IG schools to promote greater transparency and exchange between policy makers and communities, youth communities in particular. This initiative can be funded through domain registration fees. Information and inclusion in Internet governance domains have the power to shift public discourse and counter-balance violations of rights. In that sense, Brazil could offer some expertise related to their youth initiative funded by domain registration fees and managed by the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee. Making empowerment global enables actors to have a voice even when their immediate contexts are sensitive.



Left, Canadian Senator Kim Pate; right, Livia Walpen, Policy Advisor at the Swiss Federal Office of Communications

Discussion with policy makers

Inclusive Internet governance is an integral pivot point in digital policy in areas of economic, socio-cultural and political issues around the world today. An enriched and equitable discourse for IG and how it will affect the world is a vital move towards making digital spaces more inclusive. About five billion people are connected to the Internet today and encompass most of our functions in society. With the high significance the Internet plays in all our lives today, the policy and governance of platforms and related digital spaces is a priority issue for all sectors in society. Multistakeholder frameworks and youth participation are pathways we can utilize to ensure strong representation of diverse ethnic groups, age groups and other related factions. While the inclusion for the mentioned under-represented groups are primary concerns to ensure progressive policy in Internet governance, there is still much to be done in terms of inclusion of the Global South in IG discourse.

Positions or demands

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES. States should establish sustainable structures for remote-participation capacity-building, training, fellowships, and mentorship opportunities for their youth, allowing them to properly engage with public policies in relation to IG. For instance, countries can initiate their own national forums to allow an open and inclusive dialogue from the youth, or even cooperate in regional initiatives, where people can actively engage with

policy makers on different Internet policies. Finally, once young people have access to proper education and can engage in local discussion, national states should have defined policies to ensure that young people can attend meetings related to IG.

SUSTAINABLE EXPANSION OF INTERNET INFRASTRUCTURE. Internet infrastructure needs to be expanded and emphasis put on community networks to facilitate the inclusion of the next billion, but this will have environmental costs. National states should promote a carbon free Internet, also known as net zero emission.

DIVERSITY. Internet policies should take into consideration age, race, gender, sexual orientation, culture and other aspects of human existence that express our diversity. To address human diversity as a whole, the IG community should be aware of: tokenism, man interrupting, green wall, pink money and other silencing practices that hinder the ability of minority individuals and civil-society networks (particularly those in developing countries) to meaningfully engage with existing structures and compete with powerful business interests. It must also address human rights as a necessary demand.

